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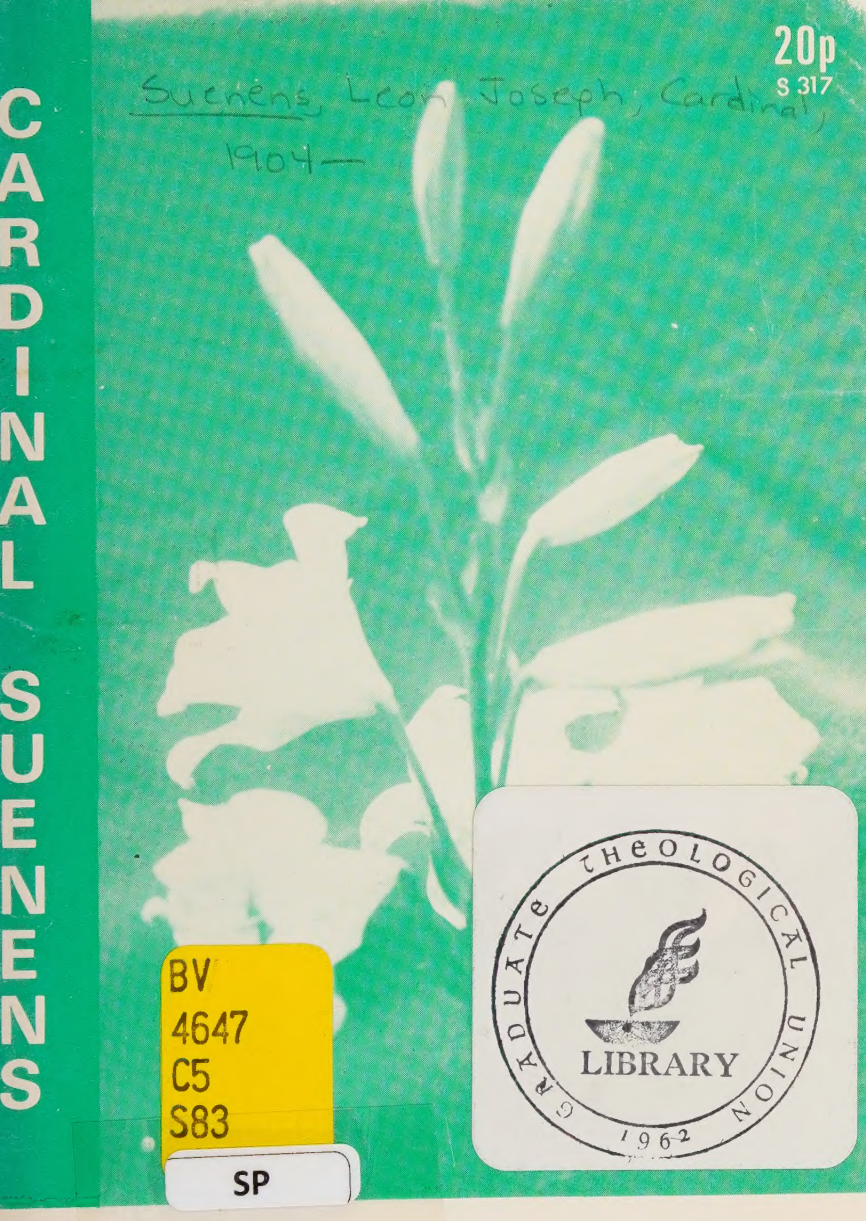

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Christian love and human sexuality

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on 'Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics' (CTS Do. 486), bishops were invited to 'elucidate' for the faithful the teaching of Christianity concerning sexual morality: it would entail enlightening the consciences of those confronted with new situations, studying traditional teaching more deeply, and enriching it with a discernment of all the factors that can truthfully and profitably be brought forward as to the meaning and value of human sexuality.[1]

I would like to reply to this invitation by reflecting on a theme that is intimately bound to those choices which, though often unformulated or implicit, determine nevertheless the attitude of each individual to life, love, and freedom.

There are, it is true, other spheres in which the future of mankind is being determined, involving moreover the 'power of love' which ought to be its motivating force: peace among nations, the safe-guarding of freedom, economic justice, respect for life . . . these are vital preoccupations that the thinking Christian cannot afford to neglect. However, taking as my point of reference the Roman document, I shall limit myself here to a two-fold purpose; on the one hand trying to say what Christian love ought to be, if it is to respond today both to the human vocation and to the demands of the Gospel; on the other, suggesting a few specific ways of putting into practice this ideal in the matter of sexuality.

Experience and morality

Admittedly dialogue is by no means easy between those whose task it is to recall basic principles[2] and those who would have it that morality is built on life itself. The latter, without going

[1] *Persona humana*, para. 13. Future citations from this declaration are given by paragraph number.

[2] Mt 28, 19ff. 2 Tim 4–2.

so far as to reduce morality to mere conformity with the *mores* predominant at a given time, maintain that experience is a major factor in clarifying and giving precision to moral laws.

While this attention to concrete facts has of course to be recognized, facts cannot, however, dictate laws. It is readily affirmed that first-hand experience is the basis of morality. But what are we to think of this affirmation? Definition gives rise to ambiguity: it could imply that moral norms only ratify contemporary *mores*. And what justification is there for assuming a conformity such as this?

It is true, however, that the 'problem of morality' can present itself really only in the face of concrete choices. It is in the presence of obstacles or particular choices that we are aware of the need of a 'compass' and directions to follow.

If many today take issue with inhuman situations in our consumer society, it is because such 'realities of life' are in opposition to principles of justice and solidarity. What can be said is that the moral life, in so far as experience is concerned, contains within itself a 'stance' of conscience which somehow precedes theoretical reflection. Morality, as the science of norms, must take into account what a well-informed moral sense offers in terms of specific judgments.

Conscience and morality

Likewise we hear repeatedly: 'We do not need moral directives: it is for each to follow his own conscience.' The truth in this statement lies in the fact that moral behaviour is always the behaviour of a particular person in a specific situation. Hence the indispensable role of the individual conscience.

But we must also stress that the conscience in making a particular decision has to take into account the objective meaning of the situation with which it is confronted. And this presupposes that the conscience is informed. For the Christian this implies the need of a continuous formation, beginning in early education and prolonged through one's entire life, in the light of the Scriptures, the Word of God, and of the Magisterium of the Church, the authoritative interpreter of our moral tradition.

Norms and Morality

At the very outset, then, it must be said that the Christian life should not be envisaged first and foremost as obedience to an

assemblage of rules laid down by God to govern our behaviour. The centre of gravity in a moral judgment cannot be reduced to mere categories of what is 'permitted' and what is 'forbidden'. The heart of morality is the basic choice which gives meaning to our life and, normally, inspires individual decisions.

The morality of a Christian is to be judged primarily according to whether he directs his life towards Jesus Christ and his message or whether he turns away from him. This does not mean at all that particular acts are unimportant. But this importance is secondary—the acts being only the 'epiphany', the 'manifestation', of the basic intention which inspires them.

Covenant morality

Essentially, Christian morality is first and foremost a 'covenant morality' to which the Christian is invited to respond in faith, hope, and love. It is in God that human love has its source and it is from him that it derives its vitality. It is within him that the total development of the human person is rooted.

Within this perspective a moral norm is not primarily a restriction or a prohibition. It is in the nature of a sign-post or a map or a fence which prevents a disastrous fall.

Against this background of 'covenant morality', we must not confine moral choice to the alternative 'sinful' or 'not sinful'. Morality is a call to advance in the direction of what is good—ultimately, that is, in the direction of God.

'What we look for from the Church,' it has been said, 'is an incentive to go forward.' This was put well by Mgr Etchegaray, currently President of the Conference of the Bishops of France:

> 'Christian morality is simply the morality of the Creed: Christianity is neither faith without law nor law without faith. We must avoid toppling into pure subjectivity, the plague of our times. The Gospel call has an objective content, but cannot, on that account, be reduced to a mere "moral system" . . . Morality means living to the very best of oneself: choosing the fulfilment of one's potential.'[3]

[3] *La Croix*, 30 March 1976, p. 8.

CHAPTER ONE

LOVE AND SEXUALITY

Within this positive and constructive perspective I would like to invite every Christian to take note of the demands made by Christianity in the delicate sphere of sexual[1] behaviour. And to begin with, I think it imperative to clarify the meaning of the word 'love' and point out ambiguities in current usage.

The word 'love'

The word 'love' is one of the most commonly used in our vocabulary today. It comes to us on the radio, on television, in countless songs, in films, and in literature. We meet it everywhere.

Unhappily there are hidden beneath this wonderful word what can only be called counterfeits of love. Actually, the word is often used to glamorize the sexual instinct and its sovereign freedom.

A Chinese sage, asked one day what he would do if he were lord of the world, replied: 'I would restore the meaning of words.' An immense service indeed to mankind! In this matter Christians have a special responsibility not to allow the word 'love' to be profaned: they should restore its meaning to it and use it only to express authentic love. It is imperative to keep love and sexuality in their proper places and not confuse them.

We cannot go into details here. It is enough to recall some of the differences between love and the sexual drive.

In my book *Love and Control* some years ago[2] I stressed certain points of contrast.

[1] The words 'sexual' and 'genital' are not synonymous. Sex and sexuality qualify our very being. The genital expression of sexuality is only one form of expression and is not to be identified with sexuality as such. However, unless the context indicates otherwise, terms such as 'sexual instinct' and 'sexual pleasure' used in these pages will generally imply a genital expression of sexuality.

[2] Burns & Oates, 1961, pp. 44–48.

Contrast

'Of course', I wrote, 'we cannot dissociate the sexual instinct and love to the point of locating the first in man's animal nature, the second in his spiritual. This would be to forget that man is a unity: that even his animal nature is charged with a spirituality proper to him as a human being. But it remains true that the sexual instinct, even if it involves a certain degree of sharing —a kind of communion—is still directed towards the possession and subjugation of the partner.

'Love, on the contrary, is based on respect for the other: respect is as necessary for love as is air for the lungs. "I could not love you as I do," a poet wrote to his wife, "if I did not revere you still more."

'Love is never the egoism of two persons nor is it a search for self by means of the other. Love is giving; it does not seek to possess. To reduce love simply to a search for sexual pleasure is to atrophy love. It is not in the name of her doctrine and all that this entails, but in the name of love that the Church lays down as the first norm of love that it be true to itself, that it respect its own essential nature. What the Church criticizes in contemporary literature is not that it glorifies love, but that it does not know what real love is: that it does not even cross the threshold of love's kingdom, remaining pitiably remote from the nobility of what is genuinely human.

Dissociation

'Love and pleasure derived from sex are distinct to the degree that sometimes the two are entirely separate. At the lowest level, there is this kind of separation in debauchery. Prostitution, which is diametrically opposite to love, shows that physical satisfaction is one thing, love another.

'In a report on "The role of men in prostitution" Dr René Biot wrote quite rightly: "The whole problem is to determine whether sexuality in man is the same force as that which drives animals to mate or if it is stamped by a spiritual component which radically alters its nature. If the first hypothesis is true, there is no reason why a man should not find a partner just anywhere, on the streets or in brothels. If, however, as we wholeheartedly believe, human sexuality is necessarily part of a much more complex unity, if human nature itself requires that sexuality be "spiritually transformed into love", then a sexual act per-

formed by a man outside the exclusive, definitive love consecrated in marriage is not only a weakness which diminishes his moral dignity—it is a caricature of full human sexuality. The intrinsic evil of prostitution is that it causes man to lose sight of the fact that his sexual powers should never be dissociated from love. Let us not speak merely of attraction, for this can remain only on the level of the senses. Rather, let us emphasize the total, irreversible meaning of the word "love". Prostitution demonstrates once and for all the gulf separating sexuality and love.'

Expressions of love

It is, I think, all the more important to stress this contrast, since it enables us better to locate love in the fulness of its reality. Christianity is wholly centred upon the duty to love, whatever a person's particular situation may be.

If the sex act can find legitimate expression only in marriage—such is the unchanging teaching of the Church—other forms of expression can be appropriate in different circumstances.

Man is made to love and to be loved. Our entire being tends towards love and desires to express love. The expression of love in intimate physical contact, whether or not complete sexual union is achieved, is authentic and true only within the context of married love—a consideration to which we will return. Outside this context, within which it attains its full potential, the sex act impoverishes man and destroys his capacity to love truly. And this is a tragedy.

A welcome evolution in the *mores* of today has rid us of some taboos and made the relations between men and women more natural, more genuine. Even so, a delicate balance has yet to be found between a past marred by Jansenism and a present where in many instances restraint has been thrown to the winds. This balance can only be attained if attitudes are clear, and only if love and sex are unequivocally and uncompromisingly distinguished one from the other.

Safeguarding love

It is vitally important that the word 'love' and the reality underlying it should be safeguarded in their purity and essential greatness. Christians—and especially Christian families—who experience real love, should not keep for themselves alone the

secret of a joy found in fidelity to the law of God which is itself the law of love.

It is for them, especially, publicly to take measures in every way available to them, to purify an atmosphere that is morally polluted, and thus save our younger generation for tomorrow. It is the future not only of married couples but the very structure of society which is shaken to the foundations—once, that is, the ground begins to crack or turn to a quagmire.

This effort to put things right presupposes that Christians are increasingly aware of what Christianity means for them and what precisely it is which makes a Christian a new being endowed with life by Christ, the redeemer and saviour of men.

CHAPTER TWO

TO BE BORN ANEW

Christian sexual morality is only a specific instance of Christian behaviour grounded in the reality of Baptism which should leave its mark on us throughout our entire lives. First, then, let us say something about this new reality bestowed by Christ.

Our Living Relationship with Christ

If someone asks what difference, precisely, does it make to be a Christian, he should not be told that it is a matter of moral principles concerning which the disciple of Christ has something of a monopoly. He should be told, rather, that it is a question of a relationship with Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, the Life.[1] Sometimes non-Christians fulfil better than ourselves the Lord's command: 'Love one another.'

To grasp the specifically Christian character implicit in the command of love, we must read to the end the words of Jesus: 'Love one another . . . as I have loved you.'[2] Jesus gives himself as the proto-type of love. To follow his example gives our whole being a new dimension which, understood in all its demands, should lead to radical changes in our lives.

To the question 'What added dimension does being a Christian bring?' one can rightly answer: 'In a sense—as far as appearances go—nothing is added.'

And yet, it has been rightly said that to be a Christian changes everything. At first sight these statements seem to contradict each other.

'But do we not find something the same in the case of those engaged to be married? What change has taken place in a young man who has become engaged? Has he become, by this very fact, more skilled in his profession? Has he become more intelligent? Outwardly no such change has taken place as a result of his engagement. And yet to be engaged transforms

[1] Jn 14:6.
[2] Jn 15:12.

his life radically. Love has bowled him over. Or, rather, someone whom he loves and who loves him has come into his life. This realization is overwhelming: it changes his entire existence. The experience of the Christian who truly believes is something like this.

'How, then, have things changed, now that I am a Christian? Apparently nothing has changed. Whether I believe or not, the world around me will remain the same. And yet belief in Jesus Christ has transformed my life. Gradually I realize that God is interested in me: that my existence is precious in his sight. For did he not come to share our human condition?'[3]

A new life-style

It is right, then, to speak of a new life. And this of necessity means new demands, an invitation to a new life-style and to a way of behaving which corresponds to this new birth.[4]

It is impossible to compress into a code of rules all that Christian morality implies. This morality is dynamic: it continuously engages us in new tasks, confronts us with new problems. It is the love of Jesus which urges us on, to go to the ends of the earth. You cannot deduce from the Gospel ready made solutions to every problem.

However, this faith, this change of heart, will bestow a new moral power. It will give to all we do a meaning of another order.

The power of the Spirit, which does not exclude natural gifts, is inherent in all a Christian does. The boldness of Peter after Pentecost, the appealing wisdom of Stephen, the joy of the disciples are human realities, but they are also, at a deep level, the working of the Spirit. In the light of faith this vitalizing symbiosis becomes experience of life, a sign of a Presence.

[3] G. Ponteville: *Les nouvelles feuilles familiales*, 1976, No. 1.
[4] Eph 4:1.

CHAPTER THREE

CHASTITY, WORK OF GOD, WORK OF MAN

The life-style required at every level by the logic of our faith finds expression in sexual matters in the practice of a virtue necessary in every sphere of life: chastity.

Today the very word has an antiquated ring. One hesitates to use it, so discredited has it become. Nevertheless, now, no less than formerly, its role is indispensable. It simply means that self-control must direct the sexual instinct if the latter is to be at the service of real love and integrated into its proper place in the development of the human person.

The Christian knows that this integration is difficult to attain and that the imbalance in our wounded nature is particularly sensitive in this area. St Paul complained of the tension he felt within himself: on the one hand, what he wanted to do; on the other, forces within preventing him.[1]

Chastity is a matter of balance. It is the fruit of God's grace, and at the same time the prolonged efforts of man at grips with his own weakness and frailty. Chastity entails growth. Just as we are not born charitable or just, neither are we born chaste. We become chaste.

Chastity means liberating for the sake of genuine love, that which is best within us. A virtue rooted in our baptismal mystery of death and life, which makes us the sons and daughters of God, it comes forth, like a flower from the stem. It is a response to the invitation of St Leo the Great: 'Christian, acknowledge your dignity and live accordingly.'

Man wounded

The doctrine of original sin which we cannot deny—whatever may be the theological interpretations of this mystery—helps us to understand man's daily experience: an internal conflict of human instincts within him and around him. Our human nature,

[1] Rom 7:18–19.

which is always with us, has indeed been wounded and is always vulnerable: the disorder throughout the world, which is the fruit of this conflict, is blazoned every morning in the columns of our daily papers.

Our natural instincts have to be controlled and channelled: violence, aggression, possessiveness, greed, and the like. Training is necessary. The exceptionally unruly sexual instinct needs to be formed, directed, put in perspective. Otherwise, man will become disoriented and compromise his capacity for love.

Man saved from himself

But if evil unquestionably exists, if we have to acknowledge that we are wounded and sinful, we must also be vitally aware of the redeeming, saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Faith refines our perception and helps us to disclose traces of evil within ourselves. Chesterton said in his paradoxical way: 'A saint is someone who knows that he is a sinner.' The Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit as of one who lightens our darkness, helps us to recognize it, judge it, and surmount it.

We find it hard to admit, not merely with our lips but in the very depths of our conscience, that we are weak in general—and much harder still to admit to any specific fault.

Yet the same faith reveals to us the horizon of tenderness and grace within the heart of God, 'infinitely greater than our own'. St John in his first letter invites Christians to acknowledge before God that 'if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things.'[2] Faith encourages us to accept ourselves as we are, with humility and patience, knowing that the patience of God goes far beyond our own and that his love not only wipes out the past but heals it and creates us afresh to a degree beyond anything we could imagine. The pages of the Gospel proclaim that Jesus came to heal the sick and those whom life has wounded.

If we doubt this, we have only to look at Calvary and see Christ upon the Cross and so understand the profundity of his redemptive love at work for all time.

Jesus the Saviour

We live in a world in which the word 'Saviour' is becoming more and more infrequently coupled with the name Jesus. To

[2] 1 Jn 3:19–20.

know and to say that we are saved—not just in theory but in fact—we must realize that we are saved from something. Jesus came to save us from ourselves, from sin, from death, from the powers of evil. All this is devoid of sense for those who proclaim that man is self-sufficient; who deny sin and dismiss as myths the hidden forces of evil. Jesus, whose very name means saviour, cannot be acknowledged as such if we are unaware of that from which we are saved.

I heard on Television someone who regarded himself as a Christian exclaim: 'I don't want to be saved, I want to be set free.' The words overlooked the fact that salvation and freedom are closely united. Jesus, by saving man, laid the foundations, through his life, death, and resurrection, of all kinds of freedom necessary to us. Christian freedom which triumphs over sexual slavery has been won at a great price. We must be cleansed in that current of graces which free us from ourselves, give us balance, and, through the Church, continue to infuse into our lives the revivifying power of Jesus our Saviour.

The sources of life

While Jesus remains the source of life and resurrection, we must live in close communion with him.

The Christian must accept humbly the laws of asceticism proper to a Christian. If today the Church no longer determines precise forms of ascetism, it rests with each Christian to introduce these into his life, in due measure, and in accordance with his circumstances. To be a Christian we have to pay a price. Also we have to be Christians along with others: every Christian needs his brothers—Christianity is not something to be lived alone.

To respond to the demands of God in the delicate area of self-control, each person needs another or a group who can help and sustain him in his efforts in moral progress. We can only rejoice to see the upsurge of groups whose members help one another to journey together towards a deeper life of prayer as well as a mutual enrichment in their Christian marriage and family life.

The breaking of the covenant and reconciliation

A Christian, unless he risks contracting spiritual anaemia, must be nourished regularly by the Eucharist and by the Scriptures

which, for today as for yesterday, are the Word of Life. He must purify himself and allow himself to be healed through the sacrament of reconciliation. A tremendous effort towards renewal must be made. Moreover this calls for a fresh awareness of what sin is. And sin can only be understood within the context of the Covenant into which God wills we should enter. The document published by the Belgian bishops in 1973[3] puts sin firmly in this perspective:

> 'If sin is always basically a breaking of the covenant, a refusal to love, it finds concrete expression in different forms of behaviour opposed to the various demands that require us to be at one with God and our brothers. This opposition understandably varies in gravity in accordance with the values at stake and in proportion as the refusal is more or less radical . . .
>
> 'Strictly speaking, then, only those acts are sins which are concrete and "dateable" choices of what is evil. Wrong-doing cannot be reduced simply to a general, fundamental attitude comparable with the background on a canvas without the "pointillism" representing particular sins.
>
> 'In weighing the seriousness of sins, we must acknowledge man's formidable capacity to scorn the love of his Creator in transgressing knowingly and deliberately, in a grave matter, the demands of this love. Certainly such an attitude is not something trivial and vague. To claim, on the other hand, that this attitude is impossible, means in the last analysis—as someone has said—that we take seriously neither God nor man.'

The effort to attain self-control in sexual matters, as well as in our shortcomings on the way, should be viewed in this perspective.

To sum up, the basic issue is a more or less deliberate and conscious choice for or against genuine love, for or against our living covenant with God.

[3] Under the aegis of the Belgian bishops, a two-fold document was published by its theological commission under the title *'Orientations pour un renouveau de la pratique penitentielle. Reflections doctrinales—Reflexions pastorales'*. It contains useful material concerning the formation of conscience and the discernment of sin. I quote from para 52–56 and 60.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHASTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

Balance

At this point I would like to show how the universal obligation to be chaste can be applied in situations requiring a diversity of application.

First of all, the context of marriage. Love in marriage has to harmonize and integrate a number of elements, without however over-emphasizing one to the detriment of another.

For a long time the sexual dimensions of human life and its importance in the growth of love were misunderstood or underestimated. Sexuality, in the broad sense, is what disposes each man and woman to enter into a loving relationship with another. Sexuality, before being an organic capability, is a 'power for relationship'.

This dimension of the personality only develops in the true sense if supported by such precious human qualities as mutual understanding, openness, warmth, compassion and support one of the other. A failure to recognize this fact means the frustration of the Creator's hope for man.

Today there is a tendency to over-value the physical side of sexuality and to isolate it from its total human context, thus giving it a priority to which it is not entitled.

This is to falsify the significance of sexuality, for true love between husband and wife means an authentic, total mutual relationship, a communion of soul, mind, heart, and body. It means that the two share and participate in life together, at a deep level. And this entails a constant struggle against withdrawal into self, against the co-existence of two personalities travelling side by side, yet never really meeting.

The experience of the movement known as Marriage Encounter, which effectively helps thousands of couples to discover the deep reality of their life together, shows to what an extent husband and wife, if they would renew their love, must exchange a life in which they live in parallel for one that is shared.

Physical union finds its full meaning only if it is an expression of a personal communion between husband and wife.

Nothing is more fragile than physical harmony if it is not supported by the other dimensions of love. It is threatened by what Ricoeur called the 'lapse into meaningless'. The proportion of marriages broken by divorce—one in four in some countries—shows that the danger is far from being imaginary.

Hence the necessity of continually situating afresh the physical aspect of marriage within the context of a union in which each partner is acknowledged and respected in his or her totality.

Freedom and creativity

For husband and wife chastity is a virtue which gives freedom and value to the human person in the depths of his or her being. The physical expression of sexuality—as we know, we must distinguish between the sexual act and less intimate ones—is beneficial for man and woman in so far as it is at the service of life and love. This is the teaching of the Church.

As the Roman Document reminds us, sexual intercourse, for the Christian, finds its true human authenticity within the sacramental context of marriage. In this its rightful context sex is an enriching source of joy and freedom for the couple.

Life's synthesis

Christian couples are invited to give to the world a living testimony of God's tenderness and creative love. All genuine love is 'a giving of self' and creative of something new. Giving birth to and bringing up children is a privilege that evolves from this creativity. When this is not possible, the creativity that is inherent in marriage can find other forms of expression which also reveal the lavish richness of God's love.

Pope Paul VI, speaking to married couples,[1] summed up admirably the real meaning of the gift made by one to the other:

'The gift is not fusion. Each personality remains distinct. It is not disintegrated as a consequence of the mutual gift of self. On the contrary it is strengthened and refined. Moreover it increases as married life goes on, in accordance with the en-

[1] *Allocution aux Equipes Notre Dame, La Documentation Catholique* (No. 1564.) 7 June 1970, col. 503–504. Also in *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1970) Washington D.C.

nobling law of love: one gives to the other, that both may give together. Love, in effect, is the binding force which gives solidity to this life lived in common. It is also the inspiration that carries it forward towards an ever more perfect fulness. The entire being participates in it in the depths of its personal mystery and its affective, sensitive, bodily, and spiritual components, thus forming ever more perfectly that image of God that husband and wife are called upon to realize in their daily life, weaving it out of their joys and tribulations—so true is it that love is more than love.

'And love in marriage is no stranger to elation: a yearning for the infinite—a yearning, too, that this love may itself be total, faithful, exclusive, creative of life.[2]

'With this perspective desire finds its meaning, in its fulness. A form of expression, a source of knowledge and communion, the marriage act supports and strengthens love. Its fruitfulness leads the couple to ultimate fulfilment. They become, in the image of God himself, a source of life.

'The Christian knows that human love is good in its origins: that while like everything else in man, it is blemished and marred by sin, it finds in Christ its salvation and redemption. Besides, have we not the lesson of twenty centuries of Christian history? And how many are the couples who have found the road to holiness in married life, the one life lived together which is founded on a sacrament?'

[2] Cf. *Humanae Vitae* (CTS Do. 411) No. 9.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHASTITY IN THE PRE-MARITAL CONTEXT

The Roman Document has drawn attention to the fact that sexual intercourse has its proper place only in the context of sacramental marriage. This reminder of traditional teaching runs counter to contemporary morals which regrettably are in a state of decline. The Church, anxious that some of her most precious treasure be not lost, cannot disclaim her responsibility to remind us of certain basic principles.

Sexuality in the service of love

As Cardinal Marty said recently:[1] 'Human sexuality is at the service of love. It is a language between persons. It is a bond making possible communication and communion . . . Carnal expressions of love have meaning; they are charged with commitment; they are a harbinger of a common future; they call for a life of respect, fidelity, and joy; they offer a welcome to fertility; they are open to the gift of life; they participate in the work of creation; they bear magnificent witness to that solidarity with the future of the human family which we carry, each one of us, within us. Hence it is only in lawful marriage that these acts find their real meaning and moral rectitude.'

Sexuality and Community

Human sexuality must always be lived in a human and, for a Christian, an ecclesial community which is always in the process of formation. It cannot ignore this context without sinking into individualism and, as a result, compromising the welfare of the social body.

We touch here upon the role of institutions (marriage in its social significance) as supports and guarantees of personal and collective development.

Here opens a wide field of reflection concerning the link today between sexuality and 'public policy'. We must see that the

[1] *Documentation Catholique*, April 4 1976, p. 334.

sexual area of life does not succumb to a blind permissiveness, the tragic consequences of which have been evident in social and economic spheres. It would be paradoxical, to say the least, if sexuality—an area in which the person is so intimately involved—were presented as a refuge for individualism. As if man were a social being only sometimes, when the whim takes him!

A declaration of the German hierarchy

In an important declaration of the German bishops on 'Human Sexuality'[2] the bishops wrote in the same vein:

'Many young people think that an engagement or a serious commitment justify sexual intercourse before marriage. In the teaching of the Church, according to which sexual intercourse is permissible only in marriage, they see either outmoded traces of a fear of sex or the suppression of human freedom in a deeply personal sphere.

'To justify sexual intimacy which they take as a matter of course, they appeal to their good conscience. But for a conscience to be good it must also be accurately informed.

'A good conscience cannot be satisfied by the fact that a more or less large number of persons are acting in the same way. That is merely jumping on the bandwagon!

'What, then, is the right attitude? What is fitting at this point in their lives? We grant, certainly, that such a way of behaving is completely different from casual and unbridled sexual indulgence which is mere licentiousness. Nevertheless the fact remains that there are serious objections. Daily experience shows us that many engagements and pledges of love do not end in marriage. In having sexual intercourse these lovers behave as if they were married, when in fact they are not. Furthermore, contrary to what is frequently said, it is not possible by indulging in premarital sex, to "try out" a marriage in advance. A personal gift of sex can only be given: it cannot be "tried out".

'Finally, in this premature sexual union, without the "yes" which binds the partner, it is forgotten that the love of two human beings, to be genuine, should be concluded before God and before man.

Documentation Catholique, 17 June, p. 579.

'It is precisely in this field that many want to enjoy personal happiness without taking into account the form of married life which is required by the Church and by society. Marriage is a sacrament which raises to a higher level the bond of love between two human beings, making of it a visible image of the bond uniting Christ to his Church. There, we have a mystery of faith which we cannot explain in a few words. In the sacramental sign the gift of sex is likewise included.

'We ask young people who are thinking of engaging in premarital sex, to reflect with sincerity on these points, to discuss them honestly and not to water down the demands of the Gospel.'

Objective relationships

We can only endorse this earnest invitation and say once more that the subjective intention to enter into a personal relationship with another does not guarantee the moral rectitude of sexual intercourse. The country priest in the novel by Georges Bernanos said to the countess devastated by the memory of her dead child: '*We* didn't invent love. It has its own pattern, its own laws.'

None of the aspects of human love can avoid being confronted with the principles which give to love its meaning. Far from being a mere source of pleasure, the human body is the *locus* through which man can express himself, as well as being for the Christian the 'temple of the Holy Spirit.'[3]

We are all involved in a network of objective relationships the meanings and demands of which we must hold in respect. We cannot interfere—unless we are prepared to pay the price—with those imposing and fundamental symbols which Christ has raised to the dignity of 'sacraments': efficacious signs, that is, of a meeting between God and man. The mutual gift of the body in the marital embrace is one of these.

Growth and integration

If love in marriage is a mutual love which tends towards complete communion in all its facets, it is important, if we really want to learn how to love, that the proper place for sexual values gradually be found.

Engaged couples should be aware that sexual progress must

[3] 1 Cor 6:19.

be sustained and supported by a like development of all the other values which contribute to the growth of the human person.

No, marriage, the public institution which confers its social dimension upon the commitment of engaged couples, is not just a formality: for man to be a member of society is not something peripheral.

Marriage is the public affirmation of a mutual responsibility being assumed, one for the other, by bride and bridegroom. It gives recognition, confirmation, and support to the 'togetherness' of the couple who have come to the point of exchanging vows.

The real question to ask should never be: 'How far can we go without infringing a law?' That would be to reduce the encounter of the sexes to something regulated by arbitrary laws dependent upon the contingencies of culture and environment. It is not a matter of reducing the area of what is permissible. We have, rather, to increase our respect for the growth of genuine love and the quality of life.

Such is required—or better such is the Christian vocation—in the matter of sexuality which the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith has thought fit to recall unequivocally: 'Sexual union is legitimate only if the man and the woman have committed themselves to a permanent life-long partnership' (No. 7).

A liberating ideal

Within a society which has too often trivialized and commercialized sex, the Church wants to protect man and to honour the sexual dimension of his life, by refusing to admit that the gift of the body should be dissociated from a mutual commitment to freedom. The Church takes seriously the sexual responsibility of contemporary man: she reminds him that the moral order concerning sexuality involves values that are most important to human life. She protests prophetically against the obsessions of a permissive society, recalling that chastity is a means required by all true love (No. 11), that it 'enhances the dignity of the human person and enables him to love truly, disinterestedly, unselfishly, and with respect for others' (No. 12).

It must be said again: the virtue of chastity—and it certainly does not mean just the 'right use' of our bodies—is not out of date for anyone. It is, nevertheless, in danger of being seriously

compromised in the cultural climate of today. Training towards self-control remains imperative. And no matter what anyone may think, self-control does not diminish a man: it is, indeed, essential to his fulfilment. Within the context of love it brings with it a deep, natural joy.

The young who are engaged to be married, or soon will be, are entitled to have the ideal of Christian chastity set before them. They should be told of recently acquired knowledge in the matter of sexuality. 'The truth,' the Saviour said, 'will make you free.' To live, we need truth as well as bread.

CHAPTER SIX

CHASTITY OUTSIDE THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

Sexual 'experiences' of the young

In the present tendency to confuse love and sexuality the latter is reduced to the immediate pursuit of a personal, easy satisfaction at the expense of the partner—even a consenting partner. This is one of the serious moral dangers that threaten our society, specially its younger members, thereby endangering the future. The marital act cannot be compromised with impunity nor indulged in prematurely, unless violence is to be done to some of our human values that most command respect. Such experiences are liable to undermine youth's capacity for idealism, generosity, and commitment.

Sexual union which is not within the context of total commitment and fidelity in love, at first sight resembles an act of love. In reality it differs as does a cut flower from a flower that is growing: the blossom that has been cut appears to be beautiful and alive, but, whether we like it or not, it has been condemned to wither—and quickly.

Love and do what you will

We must not deceive ourselves by appealing to St Augustine's words: 'Love, and do what you will.' In their context the words certainly do not mean that any kind of 'love' justifies any kind of behaviour. Quite the opposite. The positive exercise of Christian principle, they mean, can only be rooted in genuine love in accord with the Gospel. Far from encouraging permissiveness, Augustine is urging us to examine the quality of our love and be sure that what we will is really an expression of this basic conviction.

It is not freedom which results from these experiences but enslavement—the decline in vital energy and its power for the future. The search for carnal pleasure outside God's plan and his will for man engenders slavery: this search is liberating only if it is within the context intended by God.

Masturbation and responsibility

Apart from certain 'experiences' of which we have just spoken, there is another in which sexual self-control must be exercised: masturbation. Now, whether masturbation be solitary or mutual the Roman Document stresses the objectively disordered character of the search for carnal pleasure outside the context of marriage. At the same time it adds that there are considerations which of themselves permit, on an individual level, a less rigid evaluation of responsibility.

'Modern psychology', the Document says, 'offers much that is valid and useful to help in formulating a more balanced judgment on moral responsibility and in directing pastoral action along the right lines. It enables one to see how the immaturity of an adolescent—and this can persist after adolescence—psychological imbalance, or habit, can influence behaviour, diminishing a person's responsibility for his actions, with the consequence that he is not necessarily subjectively guilty of grave fault' (No. 9).

Moreover the text goes on to a principle long known to moral counsellors of experience. It is good to see it put so clearly: 'In the pastoral ministry, where it is a question of forming a sound judgment in precise instances, the habitual conduct of people should be considered in its totality not only with regard to the individual's practice of charity and of justice, but also with regard to the care shown by the individual in observing the particular precepts of chastity' (No. 9).

The Declaration recalls likewise the admittedly traditional distinction between 'objective moral order' and 'subjective culpability,' 'between sin and the moral subject:' In sins of the sexual order it happens more easily, in view of their nature and causes, that free consent is not fully given. This means that in passing judgment as to a person's responsibility caution must be exercised. The words of the Scriptures are relevant: 'Man sees appearances, God sounds the heart' (No. 10).

Formation in freedom

Writing in *Love and Control* about masturbation in its obsessional form, I said that it was clearly symptomatic of a more deeply rooted disorder and as such needed to be looked into more thoroughly. 'Often', I wrote, 'a psychological block creates a sexual tension from which the victim finds release through masturbation. In getting rid of this 'emotional block'

due, perhaps to disappointment in love or to loneliness—the real task may be to detach the adolescent from himself and from an infantilism of which masturbation is a symptom.

'A positive education encouraging greater openness to others and inspired by charity—this, coupled with social interest and commitment, will help to get him out of himself. It will enable him also to benefit to the full from prayer and the Sacraments to which every Christian should have recourse.'

The fulness of a life

There are many persons in the world who for a variety of reasons are unmarried and so do not come into the different categories which we have been considering. In this wider context we have to include, I think, those who are not married because they have homosexual tendencies. To all who, for whatever reason, are unmarried, it should be said that every life can respond fully to the Christian vocation to love: a vocation obligatory on all regardless of the sexual element.

It is a mistake to think that love is linked inherently with sex and that the absence of the latter implies a defect or impoverishment. Genuine love can grow in all its splendour and fulness in the lives of those who are ready to respond to the particular vocation that evolves from their state in life. Every life, it has been said, is great if its predominant concern has been for others. We must not allow a sense of frustration or failure to damp our enthusiasm, cloud our ideals of love and service.

History and daily life provide countless instances of those whose lives were wholly animated by love, though pleasure in the sexual sense of the word was absent. Our Saviour, who is the very incarnation of love, is the most striking example.

The charism of celibacy

It remains to say something about a form of voluntary renunciation in the religious life: the charism of celibacy. I would like to draw attention both to its greatness and its demands.

I would be guilty of a serious omission if in speaking of sexuality I were to pass over the thinking of the Church in respect of those men and women who, to respond to the call of God and give themselves in much greater freedom, have renounced the married state.

Celibacy freely chosen so as to consecrate oneself exclusively,

soul and body, to the Lord and the service of God's kingdom, can only be understood in relation to the mysterious call of the Lord himself: 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'[1]

At the outset of such a choice as this there is always, in one form or another, an inner conversation comparable with the one which took place between the Master and his disciples Peter and Andrew to whom he said: 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men . . .' The response of Peter and Andrew is entirely positive: 'Immediately they left their nets and followed him.'[2] It takes no other possibility into account. It is absolute because God is absolute.

Staking all on God

Like every choice of a way of life, that of consecrated celibacy presupposes the recognition and affirmation that man is capable of committing his own future once and for all. Certainly there are risks in every promise and in the fidelity which it demands. But is not one of man's great qualities his readiness to face risks—to weave them into the fabric of an enterprise that calls for perseverance?[3]

The choice of a life vowed to celibacy is a wager. But a glorious one! Lived in the solidarity of the Church it ought to leave one free to cry out to the world the priority of God, the greatness of his kingdom that is to come, the richness inherent in certain acts of renunciation.

In these days when consecrated celibacy is under fire—often because the inspiration at the heart of it is not understood—we must present it in its true light. We must thank the Lord for having raised up such vocations in his Church. We must pray steadfastly that many young people will hear the Master's call and respond to it generously.

Consecrated celibacy is endowed with a wealth of grace that the Church will never allow to be lost—even if experience shows that we carry our treasures in vessels of clay.[4]

Value and safeguards

This treasure is indeed precious. We must take care to defend its rationale and our fidelity to it.

To know that we carry our treasure in fragile vessels is to be

[1] Mt 11:15. [2] Mt 4:19–20.

[3] Cf my pastoral letter of 14 July 1971 on *Commitment and Fidelity*.

[4] 2 Cor 4:7.

realistic. Better this than to behave as if we still lived in an earthly paradise, or as if human weakness in this sphere were non-existent.

Fidelity to consecrated celibacy—as indeed fidelity to the Christian ideal of chastity in every walk of life—demands constant recourse to grace and to clear-sighted watchfulness over self.

Happily our times have made relationships between men and women become more direct, more natural. This has advantages, but it also entails risks. Experience regrettably shows that too often the failure to be true to one's vocation can stem from the lack of reserve which sacred commitments require.

The vocation to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom calls for an unqualified fidelity, which is characterized by a particular delicacy and firmness. Although one cannot lay down hard and fast rules, a resolute refusal to compromise is essential. In all you do and say let sincerity, and openness reflect your true self. But be guilty of imprudence, and all is lost!

To overestimate your capacity to remain faithful to God and his demands, to let yourself be carried away by feelings—your own or those of others, to allow undue familiarity is to put yourself in a false position which can only harm the spiritual life and, if you are not careful, lead to those defections which cause such distress to the entire Christian community.

Celibacy for the sake of God's Kingdom is meaningful only when it is embraced and lived wholeheartedly by one who sincerely wants to bear witness to this same kingdom.

Priestly celibacy, a grace for families

The priest who lives faithfully and happily his vocation to celibacy enjoys a grace peculiarly his own, along with a unique freedom to help couples—all couples—to build up and expand their love in accordance with the Gospel. Families who welcome him and to whom he gives spiritual help are a support to him, showing by their very openness to his priesthood how much they need the Church, the sacrament of Jesus Christ—how precious, too, and enriching for the People of God, is his personal sacrifice. The joy and peace which he inspires, confirms, or helps to restore, enable him to realize the deep spiritual richness of his ministry.

Both he himself and these families learn from experience that the sacraments and the charisms alive in the Church are complementary: they work together to build up the Body of Christ and unite the whole People of God.

CONCLUSION

To close, I would like to convey to you a three-fold wish.

In relation to God

First, allow yourselves to listen to the Word of God handed down through the living tradition of the Church. Do not assume a stance of stiff-necked opposition. Listen, rather, with a child's openness, to the Holy Spirit who gives life to the Church.

If we want to live the Christian life and to know what it costs and the joy it gives, we must allow the Holy Spirit to bestow upon us all his powers, his riches, his fruits.

We must be inspired and guided by the words of St Paul which the Pope himself quotes as 'a kind of commentary on the Declaration':

> 'Do not conform to the ways of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is God's will, what is good, acceptable, and perfect. Let love be without simulation. Abhor that which is evil. Cleave to that which is good. Be affectionate one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another'.[1]

A Christian life which allows itself to be guided in this manner by the Spirit of the Lord will taste the fruits promised by his presence. St Paul has listed the fruits by which the tree will be judged. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, *self-control*.[2]

In welcoming with all its demands the 'love that the Spirit pours into our hearts' we will receive a 'power of love' capable of transforming and giving life to every dimension of human existence.[3]

No one has lived this openness to the Holy Spirit at a

[1] Rm 1–2, 9–10.
[2] Gal 5:22–23.
[3] Rm 5:5.

greater depth than Mary, whom 'the Holy Spirit overshadowed' in the dawn of the Annunciation and on the morning of Pentecost.

Mary offered herself to him, putting herself totally at his disposal, soul and body. Her openness to spiritual motherhood on our behalf remains for us—for our generation, too—a secret of purity, freshness, youth. Her unobtrusive, discerning presence dispels the darkness in and around us. She remains for ever, in the words of the poet: 'Our Lady of the Brightness of God.'

In relation to ourselves and others

My second wish is that we accept our human condition in humility, just as it is, with its goodwill and weakness, courage and lethargy, and realize in all truth that the Lord is for us, too, Saviour and Redeemer.

The Gospel, which is the Gospel of truth, is furthermore—this we well know—the Gospel of grace and pardon.

Whether our faults are objectively serious or not, we should read again the story of the Prodigal Son, not to follow him on his peregrinations, but, above all, to glimpse the depths of the Father's kindness and goodness. What matters to him first and foremost is not the son's avowal of his faults—he is himself ready with his pardon when the son has scarcely begun to stammer his *'I confess'*! We can never stress sufficiently that the Father is much more deeply moved than is the son by the joy of reconciliation and merry-making.

We must, in humility, allow ourselves to be healed by Jesus. The Gospel shows him to us in so many places tirelessly exercising his ministry of healing on those who come to him in faith. 'Power went out from him' to heal every weakness, every infirmity, every sickness. This power continues still to work among us. To receive Jesus in the Eucharist is to welcome him who remains and will remain 'for the soul as for the body' the Resurrection and the Life. To receive him in Holy Communion is to receive here and now a pledge in anticipation of what awaits us when man is transfigured in his entirety.

In Union with our brothers

We must accept also, in humility, that we cannot live Christianity alone. We need our brothers who journey with us along the way. In the conflict which takes place within every man, first of all to

grow up, then to remain faithful day by day to his most sacred obligations, he needs the support of his brothers. *'Vae soli'* 'Woe to him who is alone!' These words of the Scriptures have a particular truth in this struggle to maintain or develop self-control.[4]

We know that God, who watches over us as a father over his children, will put on the path of each one of us the person or group of persons who will be able to speak in his name at this stage of life, at this crossing of the ways, the necessary and saving words. The Scriptures tell us: 'A brother helped by his brother is a stronghold.' What tragedies could have been avoided if at the hour of inner conflict and temptation the words of a friend, a comrade, some close companions could have been spoken in time and taken to heart. An exchange of confidences helps so much to see clearly into oneself, dispel phantoms, put things into perspective.

At a time when emphasis is readily put on co-responsibility in our relations with higher authority, we must not forget that we are also co-responsible as to our brothers and that we can be guilty of faults of omission.

In relation to the world

Finally, my third wish is in the form of an invitation to save real love from its counterfeits, from the deadly menace that looms over this sacred treasure in a world which has lost its moral bearings.

Courage for confrontation

We must go beyond the criticisms. We must listen to the basic message which the Roman Document offers. For my part I gladly subscribe to these words of Cardinal Marty which go straight to the point:

'Let us not use the limitations of a text as an excuse for ignoring the real issue which it raises. Are we going to allow human sexuality to be swamped in an immoral 'free for all' totally devoid of responsibility? Will our society still be capable of love tomorrow? How is it that our society succeeds in expressing only that within it which, in relation to love, is obscure, ambiguous, violent and commercialized?

'Love is greater than all that. And the younger generations

[4] Eccl 4:10.

have only one desire: to save love from becoming meaningless.

'Yes, we must save love. Listen to the young . . . If they speak out it is not always to revolt against prohibitions or customs, rules and principles. There is also their fear in the face of a life without love, in the face of a tragic breakdown in sexuality, love, marriage, and children. They will blame their elders for shirking their responsibilities . . . for no longer teaching them how to love.

'I could myself cite the experience of many families: those whom I meet; those who write to me. Yes, there are many families who live a life of love. It is demanding. It is sacred. It rejoices in the truth, as St Paul says.[5] 'Let them be heard, Let them speak out. Loudly'.[6]

Restoring real love

If the Christian is by vocation the leaven in the dough, it is the nature of this leaven to act on the dough to make it rise. That we ourselves live the demands of love is not enough: we must help to restore real love in the world about us.

The cheapening, the profanation of love is one of the factors, along with hatred, violence and war, in which is demonstrated most clearly the action of these mysterious forces of evil and of the prince of lies, concerning whom the Scriptures speak.

Christian families who live up to the demands of their faith —and of their love—have a special duty to affirm these demands both in public and in private and to search for concrete ways of fighting against the deterioration in morality at large in co-operation with others. May they have the courage to swim against the tide and combat all that cheapens love—in particular pornography as commercialized on the mass media. May they defend, too, the value of life from its very beginning, as they would the moral values which are the very foundation of any civilization. It is for them to remind the world of the truth spoken by the Lord when he said: 'My yoke is easy, my burden light.'[7] This promise does not exclude suffering, but it confers a peace and serenity which the world does not know. May they proclaim the Gospel of true love! If this, along with other demands of the Gospel, runs contrary, today and yesterday, to

[5] 1. Cor 13:6.

[6] *Documentation Catholique* 4 April 1976, p. 334.

[7] Mt 11:30.

opinions and ways of behaviour, it is by no means surprising. Nor is it a reason for rejecting the Gospel. In the 'permissive society' of the declining Roman Empire it was principally in the matter of chastity that the non-conformity of the early Christian communities stood out.

Why should we allow ourselves to be unduly surprised that our perspective differs from that of many of our contemporaries? We would do better to acknowledge that sexuality is one of the spheres of the moral life where the Gospel is at the same time most precise, most demanding and most compassionate.

May Christians discover again that the law of the Lord is joy to the heart and light to the eyes. These words from the Scriptures remain as true today as yesterday. We can and should repeat with the psalmist in gratitude:

> The law of the Lord is perfect,
> reviving the soul.
> The testimony of the Lord is sure,
> making wise the simple;
> The precepts of the Lord are right,
> rejoicing the heart;
> The commandment of the Lord is pure,
> enlightening the eyes.
>
> (Ps 19)

I conclude with these words of the Scriptures, asking the Lord to bless you and, of his goodness, bring alive these pages which I write with all the love I bear you. Their sole purpose is to tell you that the Lord and his law remain for ever, for every man and woman among you, your source of life and hope.

L. J. Cardinal Suenens
Archbishop of Malines-Brussels

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Christian Love and Sexuality today

The Roman Declaration on 'Sexual Ethics' (*Persona humana*) of December 1975 (CTS Do. 486) reminded bishops of their duty to teach about sexual morality. This booklet is Cardinal Suenens' response. Much of it is directed to the problems felt by the younger generation; it will particularly help parents, teachers, priests and others who find themselves asked serious questions about sexual behaviour.